

12.
A N
E N Q U I R Y

INTO THE
Law of Nature

A N D
R E V E L A T I O N.

To which is annexed,

A DISCOURSE concerning the
Mediator between GOD and
MEN.

Ἐἰ τίς με ἐλέγξει καὶ παρασῇσαί μοι, ὅτι ἐκ ὁρθῶς ὑπο-
λαμβάνω, ἢ πράσσω, δύναται, χαίρων μεταθήσομαι.
ζητῶ γὰρ τὴν ἀληθείαν, ὑφ' ἧς ὑδεῖς πῶποτε ἐβλάβη,
εὐλόγηται δὲ ὁ ἐπιμένων ἐπὶ τῆς ἐαυτοῦ ἀπάτης καὶ ἀγνοίας.
Anton. l. 6. §. 21.

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(A. M.)

END OF THE

INTO THE

CHURCH OF ENGLAND

CHAPTER I

REVELATION

To which is added

A Discourse on the
Mediator between GOD and
MANKIND.

By the Rev. Mr. John
Wesley, of the Society of Friends
in America.

London, Printed by J. DODD, in Pall-mall.

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Printed for J. NOON.

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AN
ENQUIRY
INTO THE
Law of Nature and Revelation.

CHAP. I.
Of the Existence and Attributes of God.

SECT. I.

WE are surrounded with so many clear and undeniable Evidences, of the Existence of one eternal and infinite Mind, the Fountain and Original of all Things, that it may reasonably be question'd, whether there can be such a Person as a speculative Atheist; or one who seriously disbelieves the Being of God.

B

But

But what Clouds and Darkneſs may not a vicious Life bring upon the human Underſtanding? And a Mind averſe to all divine Contemplations, perhaps, at laſt may ſink into ſuch a degree of Depravity and Folly, as to imagine there is no God.

Such a Belief is horrible and dangerous to be indulged: and he who will give himſelf leave to think, can never take Sanctuary in Infidelity.

For if there be a God, it is every Perſon's higheſt Intereſt and Wiſdom to be convinced of it: Becauſe all ſhall know it, ſooner or later. And it is better to be perſuaded, whiſt we have opportunity of acting ſuitably to ſuch a Perſuaſion, than defer the matter till we feel the Diſpleaſure of the omnipotent Arm we have deſied. Conſequently, we may hope, none will be ſuch Enemies to themſelves, as obſtinately to reſuſe the Force of ſuch Arguments, as manifeſtly prove an Article of the vaſteſt Importance, and abſolutely neceſſary to the Peace and Happineſs of Mankind.

Becauſe ſomething exiſts at preſent, there muſt have been ſome Being exiſting of itſelf from Eternity; otherwiſe it is abſolutely impoſſible there ever ſhould have any thing been. For if it be ſuppoſ'd that once there was nothing, how could any Creature ever have begun to exiſt? It could not cauſe itſelf; for it could not act before it was. It could not have any Thing to cauſe it to be; becauſe there

there was nothing. And consequently, because now there is something, there must some Being have existed of itself from Eternity.

As it is evident there cannot but be such a Being existing of itself from Eternity, such a Being must be absolutely necessary. For a Being, which cannot but be, is absolutely necessary.

Now, have Things always existed by the absolute necessity of their own Nature? Or have the Atoms of Matter been eternal, and by a lucky hit, sometime, as they were in Motion, struck in one with another, and formed themselves according to the most exact Rules of Number, Weight, and Measure? Or hath there been a Series of Causes and Effects coming down, in an eternal and endless Progression, without any first Cause, independent, and of itself?

Each Hypothesis is, methinks, equally wild and absurd: and there is not one thing in the whole, in the least likely or credible. For to talk of Things existing from Eternity, in the manner they are in, is to make those Things necessary, which are manifestly not so. For what necessity has the Universe in itself, to cause it to exist of itself? And may not any part, or the whole, very easily cease to be? Nay, it is obvious all Things are disposed to consume and wear away. The Sun wastes itself, in dispersing kind Influences of Light and Heat. The Seas exhaled in Clouds, di-

still in Dews and Rains, and are converted into vegetable and animal Juices.

Tho' we may apprehend Things reduced to their first Principles; yet it is not to be imagin'd, how the unintelligent Particles of Heat, and Drops of Dew, should unerringly convey themselves back again to their proper Fountains from whence they came.

Therefore upon Supposition of the Eternity of the World, it is plain, the Sun must have been extinguish'd, and the Seas exhausted long e'er this day.

Once more, besides the constant Flux all Things are in, the late Discovery of uncultivated Parts of the Earth, and the Improvement and new Invention of Arts and Sciences, and the Chronology and History relating to the Age of the World, make it appear as yesterday, and its Years even as nothing compared with the Days of Eternity.

Lucretius asks, If the World was from Eternity, how comes it to pass, we have no History of more early and ancient Date than the *Theban War*, and the sacking of *Troy*? And indeed it may be reasonably demanded, what Mankind were doing from Eternity, and how it happened, they did not convey to Posterity some account of their Lives and Exploits; nor so much as discover the Method of doing it? But the Notion of the Eternity of the World is certainly only a Fancy, and has no Foundation to support it.

Again,

Again, equally trifling and silly must it be to suppose its Atoms eternal, and the World formed out of them, merely by Chance. What Reason can any one have to imagine the Particles of Matter to have been from Eternity? Are there any Marks of necessary Existence impress'd on *Lucretius's* Atoms? On the contrary, they are so far from being unable not to be, that there are many Parts of Space without them. And so *Lucretius* must suppose, that his dancing Atoms might have liberty of playing themselves.

Since Space is in many Places void of them, we can suppose it swept of them all: and hence Matter has nothing in itself to cause it to exist.

But granting what is manifestly false and absurd, that an infinite number of Atoms moved about in all Directions from Eternity, still it is never to be credited, that blind and undiscerning Fortune should, from these, mould the World and all Things into this exact and amiable Form; even in such minute Degrees of Variety and Proportion, that the most perfect Wisdom cannot mend the Work.

We do not observe those innumerable Atoms that frequent our Region, make any essays towards building a Town: nay, they may play about for ever, and not erect one House.

How happened it, that Fortune should frame the fair and lovely Universe, and since
be

be able to compile nothing of the remaining loose and scattered Particles of Matter?

If once there was not any thing but Atoms, jostling in Heaps, and crouding one upon another, and not the least Understanding or Design to govern them, it is absolutely impossible there ever could have been either Contrivance or Wisdom in the World. For what a Thing hath not itself, it can't give to another. Atoms are unintelligent, and Fortune is blind; and if all Nature was once comprised in these, whence came Knowledge, and where is the Place of Understanding?

Further, to say that the World was made by Chance, if the Phrase have any meaning, must signify, that all Things stumbled into Being by meer accident: no reasonable Being can be guilty of such Folly. For suppose, this Person, that pretends to know nothing of the Origin of the World, viewing a stately Edifice, where he observes every thing surprisingly grand, curious, and finished with exquisite Art and Skill; and enquiring who the Architect was, should be told, it never had any, but that the Stones and Timber being all in Atoms, one day, purely by chance united, and composed this elegant Structure, with all its charming Furniture; would he not think the Man distracted, or worse, that could tell such an idle and incredible Story?

Now what shameful Partiality is it, and what open and wicked Prejudice, to give thyself

self such an account of the Origin of the World, as thou canst not credit, in respect of the Architecture of a House?

To conclude; The Opinion of an infinite Series of Causes and Effects, all dependent one upon another, in an eternal and endless Progression, without any first Cause, independent and of itself, is the Idea of an infinite depending Body, having nothing to depend on: which is altogether so contradictory, nonsensical, and monstrous, as no reasonable Creature can entertain it.

In one word, all Accounts of the Origination of the Universe, otherwise than that it is the Effect of an absolutely necessary, self-existent, and eternal Mind, are evidently most absurd, unintelligible, and ridiculous. Therefore it is beyond dispute certain there is a God, an infinite Spirit, or Mind, who has been of himself from Eternity, and cannot but remain so to be for ever, unchangeable, all-powerful, every where present, all-knowing, most good, most just, and possessed of all possible Perfection.

S E C T. II.

GOD is a Spirit, or the most infinite and perfect Reason, not clothed in Body, nor confined by Parts. Hence our Conceptions should fashion him into no Shape; but consider him intimate to every Creature, comprehending all Things in one view, and equally present
always

always thorough the whole Dimensions of boundless Space.

That God is an infinite Spirit, who hath existed from Eternity of himself, and independent of every thing, we have demonstrated already. Some Being must have been from Eternity, for as much as there does something exist at present. Now the Being which hath always existed, must for that reason be independent and of itself: because nothing could be antecedent to it, either to give it Being, or for it to depend on.

That Being which hath existed from Eternity of himself, must so continue for ever, without the least Variation or Change.

For, to be of one's self from Eternity, very plainly includes Self-sufficiency; and Self-sufficiency as clearly comprehends all Perfection: for in such a Being nothing can be wanting. And where there is nothing lacking in a Being, it is not possible it can alter. For it cannot change for the better, because it is already absolutely Perfect; and it cannot change for the worse, because a Being of infinite Perfection cannot be suppos'd capable of such a mistake, as to make an alteration to its Injury and Detriment. Consequently God must remain ever the same.

Hence, we may draw this Conclusion, God cannot properly be said to repent. He is unchangeably determined by the perfect Reason of his Mind to love Virtue, and abhor

hor Vice. Therefore as any Creature turns from Sin, to Holiness; it must grow in favour with him.

Love and Hatred are, in a highly figurative Sense, ascribed to the divine Being. We must not harbour so gross a Conceit, as that there can be any Transports of Passion in him. And consequently when he is said to love and hate, nothing more can be meant than those Effects which, with Men, stand for Expressions of Affection and Anger.

God is a Being of all Power. This Attribute is easy to be deduced from what has been proved already. For since all Things derive their Being, and have an entire Dependence on him, who exists of himself, and has his Dependence upon none; he must retain the Power of every thing in himself, and consequently be omnipotent.

It is most impertinent, and trifling to ask, whether or no God can commit any Deceit or Falshood? whether he can cause both sides of a Contradiction to be true? and whether he can cause himself not to exist? For such Actions are no proper Objects of Power; but argue great Weakness and Imperfection, and therefore cannot be attempted by Omnipotency.

God is present every where. For that Being which exists of itself, and upon whom all Creatures do rely, must needs be where there is any thing, because he supports every thing.

Hence, to suppose him absent from any Place, involves this grand Absurdity, that he acts where he is not.

To this it may be reply'd, can he not manage the Affairs of the Universe by Agents? and where then is the Contradiction of supposing that he may act, where he is not? The Attribute of Independency is incommunicable to any Creature. For to be made independent is to be self-sufficient; and Self-sufficiency includes all Perfection: and all possible Perfection constitutes a God. (That there can possibly be but one God, is proved hereafter.) Independency therefore can't be communicated to any Creature.

As no Creature can exist of itself, God must be present to support such Agents as he employs in the Government of the World; consequently he must be omnipresent.

The pious Antients had a just Sense of this. One of them, in his devout Meditations upon this grand Subject, breaks forth in this divine and elegant Description: *Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, thou art there: If I make my Bed in Hell, behold thou art there. If I take the Wings of the Morning, and dwell in the uttermost Parts of the Sea; even there shall thy Hand lead me, and thy right Hand shall hold me.*

God is infinite in Knowledge and Wisdom. That there is Knowledge, or Understanding,
our

Chap. I. *his Natural and Moral Attributes.* II

our own Experience assures us. Consequently, he that gave it, must be possess'd of it. For it could not proceed from a Being void of it. We have already shown, that God is present every where, and that he is possess'd of Knowledge. Where he is, there his Understanding is. But he exists every where, and consequently, is intimately acquainted with all Things. The fore-quoted Author, in those beautiful and lofty Expressions peculiar to himself, says, *Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and my up-rising; thou understandest my Thoughts afar off. Thou art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a Word in my Tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. If I say, surely the Darknefs shall cover me; even the Night shall be light about me: yea, the Darknefs hideth not from thee; but the Night shineth as the Day: yea, the Darknefs and the Light are both alike to thee.*

He who knows all Things, must always perfectly understand the best and noblest Ends; and the properest and most certain Means of bringing such Things to pass: and therefore must be infinite in Wisdom.

S E C T. III.

A N omnipresent Being, armed with irresistible Power, and endued with perfect Knowledge, is apt to beget formidable Apprehen-

sions, when we consider these Attributes separately and alone. For Omnipresence, invested with Omnipotence and infinite Knowledge, if not under the Direction of infinite Goodness and Justice, would be universal and uncontrollable Craft, and capable of acting any Evil and Mischief. But to complete the Notion of God, he is infinitely good and just. Omnipresence possess'd of the highest Goodness and Benevolence, and of all Power to execute its gracious and merciful Designs, is the most extensive Blessing. This perfects the divine Character, and renders God the most amiable and desirable Being in the Universe.

God possesses all Goodness: For he is absolutely happy in himself. This he must be, as he is self-sufficient and endued with every Excellency. That Being which is perfectly happy, must be absolutely good. For it is not to be denied, that as far as any evil Disposition prevails in any one's Mind, he is so far wretched and miserable. But the divine Being can't, without a Contradiction, be supposed in any degree uneasy; and therefore, he must in all possible Degrees be good.

He who is, in his own Nature, Goodness itself, must be highly pleased with the Exercise of this Perfection. We may accordingly observe the divine Goodness exerted infinite ways. It issued forth in the Creation of the Universe, and the Preservation and Welfare
of

Chap. I. *his Natural and Moral Attributes.* 13

of all Creatures are constant Emanations from the same Fountain.

And we do not scruple to affirm, that at one and the same time God's Goodness, and all his other moral Attributes, his Benevolence, Patience, and Clemency, are demonstrated. For in the elegant Phrase of a most sublime Writer, Goodness itself must be good to all, and his tender Mercies be over all his Works.

From this Consideration, it is most easy to deduce the divine Rectitude and Justice. For a perfectly good Being will invariably do, what is exactly right and fit. As far as any Being in the Administration of its Distributions, neglects to weigh the real Merits of the Cause in an impartial Balance, and deviates from what its moral Sense, or the Reason of its Mind dictates as fair, and equitable, (whether the Guilty be acquitted, and the Innocent suffer; or the Sinner be rewarded together with the Virtuous,) it is govern'd more by Caprice and Humour, than Equity and Reason; and is more under the Influence of fond Pity, than real Compassion.

But perfect Goodness will do what is entirely just. But God is absolutely good, and consequently, will do what is right; and will most certainly render to all Men, according to their Works.

S E C T.

S E C T. IV.

FROM these Perfections of the divine Nature, consider'd together, it manifestly follows, there can be but one God: That this one God must exercise an universal Providence, enjoy entire Liberty, and possess every imaginable Perfection, natural and moral.

There can be but one God. For God has been demonstrated a Being absolutely necessary, and possessing such Perfections as serve all the Occasions of the Universe. All other Gods must, therefore, be most superfluous and unnecessary. A God there is no need of, must be no God. Consequently, we may fairly conclude, there is one God, and there is none other.

This one God exercises an universal Providence. To constitute this extensive Care, reaching to the minutest Things, infinite Intelligence, endued with absolute Goodness, and Power, and Omnipresence, were only wanted. For a perfectly good Being, which understands all Things, is able to do all Things, and is at once present to all Things, will most undeniably look after all Things. But we have shewn, God is such a Being, and therefore the Exercise of divine Providence can't be disputed.

Finally, God enjoys the most absolute Liberty. For as far as any Being has Reason, and is able to govern itself by the Dictates
of

Chap. I. *his Natural and Moral Attributes.* 15

of the same, it evidently is so far free. But God is a Being of infinite Reason, of all Power and Goodness. Since he is almighty, he can without resistance effect every thing, agreeable to his perfect Reason. As he is infinitely good, he cannot labour under any Motive, to act unsuitably, and contrary to the absolute Reason of his own Mind; and must, therefore, possess most ample and entire Freedom.

That Being, which can labour under no perverse Biass, must be without moral Blemish, and a Being of the most spotless Purity and Holiness. What possible Perfection else can be, is eminently in God, who is the blest Original of all Excellence and Happiness.

Now, seeing we are instructed in the most bright and distinguishing Characters of the divine Being; that his all-perfect Nature gives him a vast and infinite Preheminence; that all have derived their Existence from him, and have a constant Reliance on him, who only has Independency: hence, he must be worthy of our highest Esteem and Affection. Therefore what a wicked Phrensy has seized the Minds of those, that labour to extinguish all Sense and Feeling of the Being and Perfections of God? For a fatherless and forlorn World (if it was possible there could be such a thing) would be a most melancholy and affecting Object. And in what a hopeless and
distracted

distracted State must Mankind be without God and Providence ?

Those are prophane Wretches indeed, that wish it in their power to turn the best and most desirable Being out of the World ; and thus take an effectual Method of plunging the whole into horrid Distraction and Misery. The most black and dismal Fears must often chill such wicked and desperate Minds : and the gloomy Terrors of his Indignation whom they, at other times, have ventured to deride and defy, must raise the most violent and severe Storms of Consternation in their evil and timorous Breasts. Let us therefore not entertain any atheistical Thoughts, being persuaded they will produce vile Affections, and quickly turn to the most tremendous and shocking Apprehensions : *But always glory, and rejoice in this, that we understand and know, there is a God, who exerciseth Loving-Kindness, Judgment and Righteousness in the Earth.*



C H A P.



C H A P. II.

Of the Faculties, and Powers of the Human Understanding.

S E C T. I.

A GOD, infinitely good, and wise, could have no view in Creation, but the Production of Happiness. For since he was always absolutely perfect, he could not propose any Advantage to himself from his Creatures. And as he is possess'd of all possible Goodness, he can't be the Author of any Evil, or Misery. It must therefore have been to communicate Felicity, that he made the Universe; and all those necessary and entertaining Objects suited to the Support and Happiness of every Individual, and agreeable to its Nature.

Man, evidently, has very exalted and sublime Faculties; and Powers so enlarged, that nothing but God, can yield him real Content and Satisfaction. And it is unquestionable, therefore, that God will, by a free Inter-course with him, replete his Desires and consummate his Happiness.

D

Man

Man is certainly a Being, capable of all the various Modes of thinking : his Mind, from external Objects, soon becomes furnished with a large Stock of simple Notions ; and has a Power in itself of retaining such Subjects of Thought, till it reflect upon, and compare them : and then, as it observes their Agreement, or Disagreement, can join, or separate them ; and in this manner, make innumerable Deductions, argue, and discover this is true, that is false ; this certain, the other uncertain.

Every Person, that in the least observes what passes in his own Mind, will, by Experience, find the Operation of the Powers of Retention, Reflection, Comparison, of uniting and disjoining Things as they agree or disagree ; and of arriving at the Discernment of Truth and Error, of Good and Evil. And since, in this manner, we must be sensible, the Soul acts, and that this is a just Description of its Faculties, any one might as well dispute, whether the Sun be in the Firmament at Noon, as whether we be endued with Reason and Understanding. For whilst we behold the one in the Heavens, we feel as clearly the other in our Bosoms. And we may be as soon brought to doubt of the Reality of Sense, as Reason.

The Mind has, likewise, a Power of acting consistently with the Dictates of Reason ; and of chusing what it certainly perceives to be

be good, and of shunning what it distinctly knows to be evil. Thus, Man appears capable of moral Government, and as he is immortal, he's a proper Subject of eternal Joy or Punishment.

S E C T. II.

HUMAN Liberty consists in a Power of doing what is agreeable, and of avoiding what is disagreeable to the Dictates of Reason, and of our Duty and Happiness.

The Freedom of the supreme Being, consists in a Power of conducting himself, according to the Direction of his own infallible Reason, Chap. 1. page 15.

And whereas it is impossible, he should be under any perverse Influence, to contradict or transgress the Dictates of his Mind, he is the most entirely free.

Though human Liberty be not so perfect, yet it is of the same Nature with the divine, as every one must be convinced, that will fairly examine wherein the one and the other consists. And consequently, our Liberty is a Power of conforming our Actions, according to the Measure and Guidance of Reason, and the Will of God however signified to us. And therefore the more exact our Comportment with our Duty, the more entire is our Liberty.

Now to affirm, that Liberty, or a Power of acting suitably to the Law of our Nature, implys a kind of Independency, and is incommunicable, is most absurd and ridiculous. For if we were without Ability of conforming to the Rules given to direct us, why should Almighty God vouchsafe us Reason, and in various ways make us understand, it is his Pleasure, and our Happiness, that we should act so and so; whereas, at the very same time, he must know we can do nothing, but in every thing are acted upon? At this rate we may justly complain of evil and cruel Usage: since those very Powers, which we imagine make us superiour to the Brutes, do, in reality, render us inferiour, as they serve only to pour Insults upon us; in requiring our Obedience, when it is impossible for us to obey.

If all be carried by irresistible Impulse, then we are nothing but a Machine, or piece of Clock-work, merely passive. Why then do we approve ourselves for this, and condemn ourselves for the contrary Action? How are we reckon'd to do any thing at all? for, to say truly, we suffer all things. And why are we sometimes, through Hope, elated and in a Fool's Paradise; and again tormented with the oppressive Agonies of vain Fear? while, in equity, we deserve no more Reward or Punishment, than the Clock that points out the true Hour of the Day. But it is contrary to the known Benevolence of the divine Mind, to
treat

treat any of his Creatures in a delusory and ungenerous manner. We may be convinced, beyond all suspicion, God has made our Actions to result from, and be the Offspring of our own Choice.

If we consider what passes in our Minds, Experience acquaints us, that we are furnished with Freedom and Liberty. We find Conscience, our Bosom-Judge, constantly declaring, that it is in our power to live up to the Dignity of our Natures ; and that when we act contrary to Reason, the Fault is wholly our own, and therefore we are guilty and criminal.

It is not so easy to stop the Clamours of our moral Sense, as some imagine. For while we pursue any vicious Course, it is scarce possible to keep it silent, but it will complain and reproach us.

That we should be cover'd with shame, and under the most intolerable Anguish of Mind when we do Evil : and, on the other hand, that we should applaud ourselves, and be wrapt up in the highest pleasure, when we live as becomes us ; can no other way be accounted for, but upon the Scheme of human Liberty.

It is not at all inconsistent with, and destructive of Freedom, to be determined by Motives. For this is only to see the Reasons of our Choice ; and be sensible of the Grounds of our Actions. In this manner, even God himself is always determined. For it is impossible

possible he should not understand the Reasons of his Conduct. The more any Man searches into, and is determin'd by the best and most substantial Motives, the more entire is his Liberty.

To oppose divine Prescience against the Freedom of the Creature, and to pretend God's Fore-knowledge destroys Man's Liberty; or human Freedom must overturn divine Prescience, is arguing in the dark. For we can't discern, whether there be any Connection between the two Subjects. Tho' we cannot tell, how Almighty God foreknows all Things, we are sure it is so, as not to infringe the least upon the Liberty of his Creatures: because, (as we have already shewn) it must be God's Design (as he hath made us rational and moral Agents) to invest us with Liberty, and we plainly discover we are free. But as for Prescience, the most we know of it, is, that God foresees all Things that will be, but this is no Cause of such Actions, as he has made to depend upon the Choice of intelligent and free Creatures: because, they would have as certainly chose to act as they do, tho' this had been absolutely unforeseen. And consequently, since Prescience is no ways influential to produce, or cause Men's Actions, it can't be said to be the Destroyer of human Liberty, and the Introducer of Fate and Necessity; neither can the Freedom of the Creature

ture be fairly represented at variance with, or subversive of the Creator's Fore-knowledge.

In one word: In all such Instances, it is the surest course to distinguish betwixt what is certain and uncertain; and firmly adhere by Certainty, not disturbing ourselves with those Points, where we cannot hope to arrive at it. And therefore since we feel ourselves free, and understand this is a matter of the highest Importance to Religion and Virtue, we ought most strenuously to plead for and defend human Liberty, the Pillar and Ground of all Goodness and Happiness, and what only can render us rewardable. But for Prescience, it is enough to know it is so conducted, as not to interfere with our Freedom, and it is needless to trouble our Heads further about it.

Indeed Liberty is in the greatest danger from Man himself. For as it consists in the Agreement of our Behaviour to our Reason, and to the Will and Pleasure of God however declared; it is obvious, that we may run counter to our Duty, till our Liberty of obeying our Reason be so weakned, that it will be very difficult to bring ourselves to comport with it. Every bad Habit embarrasses our Freedom; and we may indulge our vile Inclinations and Passions, till we lock it in those heavy Shackles, which will almost be too hard to get loose from. Some surrender up their Liberty to Malice and Revenge, others to Injustice and Fraud, others to Debauchery and Un-

Uncleanness; and soon find it so hard to curb themselves, they are tempted to believe, they even are necessitated in all their Actions.

But though Men may bring themselves to think so, this, far from extenuating, must aggravate their Guilt; because if they be under a sort of Necessity it is wilful, and they have induced it upon themselves. And where this is the case, such habituated Profligates are worthy of this horrid Character, *They can't embrace the Truth, they can't cease from Sin.*

I hope now I have made it evident, wherein human Liberty consists, and that there actually is such a Thing, and in what way it is most in danger of being injured and lost. Hence we may learn the Original of Sin and Misery, and understand how it happens, that Things are so far departed from that happier Situation, they must at first have been in.

S E C T. III.

WE find we become Sinners, by neglecting, or refusing to act in conformity to our reasonable Powers, and to the Will of God otherwise expressed to us. When Man had stronger Faculties, certainly Improvement and Obedience were then requir'd in proportion to his Strength; but this he was not so careful about, as he ought to have been, and so plunged himself into Sin, and Guilt, and Misery.

Hence,

Hence, Sin consists in a wilful and chosen Refusal of acting suitably to our Powers, and those Privileges which infinite Goodness vouchsafes, and whereby it distinguishes us.

It manifestly follows, that the Wickedness and Misery of Mankind cannot be justly attributed to any Defect of the divine Goodness and Care for them. For it was the Riches of Goodness, that furnished us with such superiour Faculties, and it must be the height of Ingratitude to slight and abuse them; and what if we upon any terms consent to, Guilt, Confusion, and Wretchedness are necessary Consequences; which infinite Goodness, in conjunction with almighty Power, cannot prevent, but they will unavoidably overtake us.

God himself cannot bring us in clear, at the same time we are guilty and criminal. For he cannot cause a thing not to be, while yet it is.

Where there is Guilt, there will be a degree of Unhappiness, in exact proportion to it. For Guilt always implies Trouble and Sorrow: and if Men chuse to transgress the Laws of their Nature, they must endure the Consequences of such Folly.

The divine Being, who never swerves from acting in conformity to the Truth and Reality of Things, can't treat Men, that do not live answerably to the Power they have of obeying their Duty, like those who have con-

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scientiously observed it; because this would be declaring the Rebellious and Wicked, Virtuous and Good, equally meritorious; and affirming Things to be, what they are not.

It is therefore manifest, Sin is the Origin, and Source, of all those innumerable Calamities we either experience at present, or are apprehensive of hereafter. Those Miseries it brings upon us in this Life, seem to be designed, by Heaven, to awaken us out of our Security, that we may not only reflect upon its Evil and Malignity, but by a speedy Retreat, escape those severer Plagues which await it in the future World.

From these Considerations, it plainly appears, Man himself is the real Author of all the Misery he feels now, or may endure hereafter.

If any should ask, why infinite Goodness prevents not Sin, which produces such dismal Effects in this and the coming World? the Answer is easy. Man is a rational and free Agent, and cannot consistently with his Nature, be laid under any Restraints. He is capable of understanding and obeying the Dictates of Reason, and the express Will of his Maker. He has Life and Death, Happiness and Misery set before him, and it is his own Choice he inherits.

Lastly, After Men have made themselves Sinners, infinite Mercy cannot do better for them, than seek to reclaim them, and incline them

them for the future to act consistently with their Nature and Character. It is certain, God is averse to our Destruction; forbears us with much Long-suffering and Patience; and, in the mean time, uses the Calamities connected with and accompanying Vice, to stop its Growth, lest it should bring us into those dreadful Torments, out of which there is no Redemption. Thus he strives to rouse in us a Sense of the Wisdom of maintaining our Liberty and Virtue entire, in opposition to all the various Temptations of rendering it up. Yea, divine Benevolence spares no means proper to render us sensible of our Duty; and careful to practice it. And since our Minds are possess'd with a Principle of Liberty and Choice, and in this manner are capable of moral Government, they, we may be sure, are immaterial, and naturally immortal, and fitted to reap eternal Joys or Torments.

S E C T. IV.

THE Properties of Spirit and Matter are quite of a different, and distinct Nature. Matter is extended, and may be divided, is solid, and may be touched and seen; but the Mind hath no such gross Qualities, but is *pure Thought*. For though we perceive Reflection, Reason, Choice, Joy and Grief in the Soul, yet these are all Thought; and therefore the Mind is a simple and uncompound Being.

Though it may be suppos'd Matter, if not annihilated, will remain in Being for ever ; yet, it cannot be denied, that all Bodies, compounded of various Particles, soon crumble into pieces : The Links of Union are loosen'd and broken, and immediately the regular System they formed, falls to ruin, and ceases to be what it was. But the Mind, which is not *compiled* of various Atoms, nor of any Atoms at all, has no Parts to run into disorder, or to be thrown out of their exact relation ; and therefore it must always be the same it is.

Since the Soul is of such a simple and indiscernible Nature, it is immortal ; *i. e.* it will not wear or fade away, but for ever be the very same Substance it is. And therefore it is reasonable to suppose, as almighty God invests it with such a firm and indissoluble Texture, he intends the Length of its Duration to be equal with Eternity.

Man certainly is capable of moral Government, and under Engagements to obey the Laws of the same ; and it cannot but be very acceptable to the divine Being, to observe us striving to live agreeably to the Obligations we are under ; and it must be as offensive and displeasing to him, to behold us act in contradiction to our plain Duty.

But as here, there is no Difference made betwixt the Righteous and the Wicked, (for in the present Administrations of Providence all Things come alike to all) this is an additional
Proof

Proof of the Soul's Immortality, which we may hope will be ordered by God to a State of Happiness or Misery, as it has done good or evil.

Till Men become strangely depraved, they strongly desire and thirst after endless Existence. And even after they have immers'd themselves in Sense, and almost are reduced to a necessity of taking Sanctuary in Infidelity, Fears of an Eternity recur, and make them quake and tremble.

That the Soul survives the Body, has been received, both by the Philosopher and the Peasant; and is a Notion the rude and uncultivated, as well as the more learned and civilized Countrys have entertained. The antient Tradition has been continued, tho often disfigured in the Representations which have been drawn of the Receptacles of the Ghosts of the Departed. And methinks, it may with more certainty be said, the Soul is immortal, than what becomes of it, on its Remove out of this Tenement. We should be at a loss to tell, whether it was sent to traverse the Regions of the Air, or was tossed from Body to Body, but for the bright and instructive Discoveries of divine Revelation. Therefore, it's proper to wave all farther Thoughts upon this Subject, till we have examined the Truth and Authority of the holy Scriptures.



CHAP. III.

Of Natural Religion.

S E C T. I.

RELIGION in general, is that Obligation we are under to know and practice the Rules of Piety, Righteousness, and Sobriety, in order to our Usefulness while we live, Comfort when we die, and Happiness for ever.

That System of Doctrines we can collect, by the Exercise of our rational Faculties, on the Works of God ; and the Duties our moral Sense requires us to observe, in consequence of the Relation we stand in to the rest of Beings, and of our own Character as Men, is termed the Religion of Nature.

From the Works we infer the Existence of God. There is not the smallest Flower we can look upon, but, if we examine it, commends the Hand that formed it. How much more then, must the Universe declare the Glory of God ? The azure Sky, with that glorious Luminary the Sun, the spangled Heavens with
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the fainter Light of the Moon and Stars, cannot but inspire every considerate Spectator with devout Thoughts, and with the highest Strains of Piety towards that Being, which spreads this grand and surprizing Prospect to our View.

If we turn our Eyes, and look down, we behold the Earth covered with the most agreeable and surprizing Variety. Here Fields drest in beautiful but different Liveries, there Mountains with Woods. And again, Seas, Rivers, and Fountains circulating within themselves, and supplying the vegetable and animal World with proper Juices.

What Millions of Creatures swarm on every side? some for Use, others for Pleasure, and all admirable in their kind.

In all these Things, the Exercise of divine Providence makes itself visible and evident. For it directs Creatures destitute of Sense, to answer their various Ends; and wields the mighty Luminaries of Heaven, preserves them at exact Distances, and orders their Risings, and Settings, that they diffuse the most kindly Influences, and agreeably entertain us with the Changes of Day and Night, of Summer and Winter. It likewise conducts the Beings, that furnish the sensitive World, and causes them to act, as if they had Reason and Understanding; and it signally presides in the moral World in the defeating wicked Designs,

signs, or over-ruling them, and in bringing Good out of Evil.

Now Man is the only Creature upon Earth, known to be capable of observing all these Things; *and therefore, like the great Priest of Nature, appointed to officiate in the room of all inferiour Orders*, it is his undeniable Duty, to offer continually the Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving to Almighty God.

Thus as the Being of God, and his Providence, present themselves daily to our serious Consideration; so our moral Sense, or the Reason of our Mind, will call upon us constantly to pay Homage and Love, Reverence and Duty, to the kind Father of the Universe.

S E C T. II.

WHAT his Will, and our Duty is, we may in some measure discover, by taking into our View the Relation we sustain to our Fellow-Creatures, and the rest of the Beings of this System. For as the great Author of Nature has so laid the Scheme of his Creation, that all Things under him depend one upon another, it must be his Will and Pleasure, and the Duty of all reasonable Creatures, to act as the several Relations they stand in require.

Superiority of every kind, whether founded in Relation, Knowledge, Riches or Power, should be employed in nursing, instructing, and

and screening those Objects that fall within its Sphere, and come into the reach of its Influence.

For not to do it, would be to neglect the Ability and Opportunity of doing good, and being useful. But to pervert and abuse it, by Insults and Tyranny, our moral Sense must tell us, is ungenerous, vile, and criminal.

Inferiority, likewise, whether arising from Relation, Ignorance, Poverty, or from Weakness, should be dutiful, attentive, humble, patient and contented. For to be otherwise, would be to plunge into Rebellion, to hinder our Improvement, to be envious, and to make the Situation of our lawful Superiours very uneasy and troublesome.

As there evidently subsists a mutual Dependence between Man and Man, mutual Justice must secure one another against Injuries, and in the Possession of their undoubted Rights, and administer strict Equity, and let a Course of Favours pass and repass. For to transgress this Order, would be to act, as if every Man was born wholly for himself; which is, manifestly, to contradict the Design of our Nature, and to introduce Confusion and Misery.

Since Creatures of an inferiour Rank supply us with many Necessaries, and are very serviceable, we should treat them with Humanity, and abuse nothing under our Subjection. For to be severe to them, or to put

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them to unnecessary Pain, is to deny them a suitable Return for their Usefulness, and discovers a cruel Disposition, which is most abominable and hateful.

S E C T. III.

AS Men, we are compounded of Reason and Sense. Our rational Faculties are the most noble and excellent Powers we have, and therefore ought to rule and govern us.

Since it is Reason that distinguishes and dignifies our Nature, it is manifest we are to see to its Presidence and Improvement. For if we neglect to secure its Authority, we expose it to be trampled upon by every insolent and imperious Pretender, and it will quickly be torn from its Throne.

When once so happy a Governour and blest a Guardian is vilified and dethroned, then there being none to rule, all must be in a dismal Tumult and Uproar within; and what Wretchedness this must produce, Words will not utter.

Our Passions are known and notorious Incendiaries, and eager to usurp the Dominion; but they are not to be dallied with, nor entertained; they are not to be admitted to the Regency, or submitted to. Because to do this, would declare we had abandoned our Reason, and were weary of being Men, and had made

made ourselves like the Brutes, wholly influenced by Sense.

The Excesses of Carnality are to be always withstood ; for they don't only cloud and eclipse the vigorous Exercise of our reasonable Powers, but likewise surfeit and *blunt* those sensitive Organs, that make Things appertaining to the animal Life tasteful and entertaining to us.

Voluptuousness, at the same time transforms us into Epicures, and dulls our Sense of Pleasures ; sets an Edge upon our Inclinations, but takes off the Quickness of the Relish : than which Condition scarce any can be imagined more deplorable, to have ardent Propensities, but Powers so debauched and impaired, as to perceive no Entertainment. Consequently we should avoid all carnal Excesses.

Covetousness, or an excessive Desire of Riches, is to magnify our Wants : while a very moderate Thing would satisfy us, we suffer our Desires to grow, till nothing can do it. We scrape, and the more we scrape together, the more inflamed is our Thirst, and we are always in need ; so that we deprive ourselves of the Enjoyment of what we possess. And this is such Folly and Affliction, as the Respect we owe ourselves will make us cautious we fall not into.

Ambition, is the Desire of climbing up a very high, steep, and slippery Ascent, whose Top is difficult to be reached, and still more

dangerous to be stood upon. This ought to bound our Pride and Vanity, and keep us from the immoderate Pursuit of Honour.

As we should take no Measures that will injure our Constitutions, and usher Misery in upon us, because this would be Cruelty to ourselves; so we must not under any Uneasiness that may seize us, nor in any Pet or Fit of Discontent, destroy ourselves. For we are not to be influenced by the Impressions of Sense contrary to Reason; and if this be consulted, it will shew us, that Self-Murder is shameful and wicked Cowardice, that it's deserting our Post, and running off the Field in time of Action, without the Consent of our Commander.

On one hand, the Beauty and Excellency of Virtue in its own Nature, and the Harmony and Felicity resulting from it, are Motives to enforce the strict Observation of it; on the other hand, the Deformity and Odiousness of Vice in itself, and the Disorders and Miseries flowing from it, are to influence us to shun acting inconsistently with our Sphere and Relation, and contrary to the Requirements of our moral Sense.

S E C T. IV.

WHETHER the Obligation to Virtue be founded in, and arise from the Will and Pleasure of Almighty God, or the Nature of Things, does appear hardly worthy of any Dispute,

Dispute, if well consider'd. For if we ascribe the Nature and Relation of Things to the Will of God, we must likewise found the Obligations of Virtue there too. And we must make the Natures and Relations of Things depend upon the divine Pleasure, or recur to that most unintelligible and absurd Supposition, of all Things being Authors of themselves.

To found the Obligation of Virtue in the Will of God, does not cause the Difference between Virtue and Vice so to rely on his Pleasure, as that he may make Virtue to be Vice, or Vice to be Virtue. For the supreme Being, by the absolute Perfection of his Nature, is eternally secur'd from creating any thing with evil Dispositions, from instituting any Relations, but such as are good, and from signifying any thing to be his Will, that is not in itself right. Consequently, so long as he requires reasonable Creatures to comport with the Nature he hath given, with the Relations that arise therefrom, and with his Will in any manner signified, he must oblige them to live according to the Rules of Virtue. Therefore the divine Mind can no more cause Vice to be Virtue, or Virtue to be Vice, than he can contradict himself, or enjoin his Creatures to neglect the Nature he gave, those Relations he instituted, and his Mind declared to them.

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S E C T. V.

NOW, so long as the Reason of Mens Minds shines in its original Lustre, and is not obscured by Lust, nor perplexed with Guilt, neither blinded through Prejudice, they can scarce desire a more certain Guide. But Sin entirely changes the Scene, it darkens the Understanding, and perverts the Will, and makes supernatural Revelation necessary to dispel those Mists wherein our Reason is bewildered; or we must wander in Ignorance, Doubt, and Uncertainty all our Days.

Experience is proof beyond Denial, that the generality of Mankind can't employ their Faculties in a Train of Reasoning: either they are incapable, or want leisure, or are prejudic'd against it and unwilling to do it; and are so far from deducing their Duty and Happiness from the Nature of Things, that it is even very difficult to bring them to understand what this means.

We may now appeal to any impartial Judge, whether in the present State of Things, it be not a more plain, easy, and certain Method of instructing Mankind, to turn them to a Book well and strongly attested to be of divine Authority, than to leave them to search for the Rules of their Conduct in the large Volumes of Nature, scarce legible to many, and which require the Leisure, Diligence, and

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Understanding of the Philosopher to examine. And he with all his Reason and Penetration shall be unable to discover those Things, that are of the highest Importance to the well-grounded Hope and Peace of Mankind. For it is God that must state the Terms of his own Mercy and Forgiveness. And it is impossible that the Rebel, who deserves to be condemn'd, should find that his Prince will propose and pass an Act of Grace and Indemnity, before he expressly declare this to him.





C H A P. IV.

Of Reveal'd Religion.

S E C T. I.

REVELATION, is that clearer Light the Favour of God has afforded Sinners, to discover the Method wherein he'll vouchsafe them Absolution, and become reconciled to them. And this was made known to the World by such Steps and Degrees as infinite Wisdom (which we may be sure always acts from good and sufficient Reasons) thought convenient, but was perfected in the glorious Gospel of our Lord and Saviour. Therefore the Writings of *Moses* and the Prophets offer themselves, first of all, to our Consideration.

The *Mosaic* Account takes in the Creation of the Heavens and the Earth, how Sin was introduced, and the several Essays of Providence towards hindering its Progress amongst Mankind. How an universal Deluge swept the World of its Inhabitants, because their Impiety and Prophaneness was become execrable and intolerable; and only one, the best
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and most excellent Man, that corrupt Generation afforded, was spared, together with his Family.

When Men, after this general Devastation and Wreck, were, once more, multiplied upon the Earth, God selected a People to himself; the Family of a Person, who had rendred himself most eminent and acceptable for Faith and Piety, who with-held not his Son from being made a Sacrifice, and who commanded his Children and Household after him, to keep the Way of the Lord; to do Justice and Judgment. Therefore for *Abraham's* sake, he chose his Descendants to maintain the Knowledge and true Worship of himself; to teach the rest of Mankind his Statutes and Judgments, and to reclaim them from the pernicious Sin of Idolatry. Hence, it is evident, that the divine Being had a Respect and View to the Good and Welfare of the World, when he made choice of that Family for his peculiar People.

For this end, he delivered that noble and divine System of Morality in the ten Commandments; and as a proper means to secure the Observation of it, he instituted many Rites and Ceremonies as Fences against the Superstitions of Idolatry, as lively Instructions in the Duties of moral Purity, and as Types and Figures pointing to the Saviour of the World, in whom all the Families of the Earth should be blessed. He likewise sent his Prophets

phets to draw the Character, and describe the Office of this happy Person, that Men might know the Original by the Picture, and be able to say, this is he we have so many ways been told of. And it was the Business of these Men, as often as this People forsook the Lord and broke his Commandments, to threaten them and foretell their Doom if they repented not.

If they would not hearken, but were resolved and obstinate in an impious Course, the Nations around them were employ'd to chastise them for their Iniquity; or else they were left to fall upon and plague one another. And on the contrary, when their Heathen Neighbours became exceedingly degenerate and wicked, the Jews were made use of to scourge and humble them. This is the History we have of the Conduct of Providence towards Jews and Gentiles, which seems to have nothing in it weak, or unworthy of God, or that can in the least invalidate these sacred Books.

As for a few particular Instances in these justly valued Pieces of Antiquity, though one was unable at this Distance of Time to give a full and satisfactory Account of them; yet it would be unreasonable, and ridiculous, to throw away the whole for the sake of a Passage or two, that are dark and obscure; we ought rather to silence all cavilling and prejudice. However, therefore it may not be amiss here

here to enquire into the Topicks, that have been so much declaimed against.

S E C T. II.

OF this number, is the Account we have of *Abraham's* being tempted to sacrifice his Son: that is, say they, for God to require him to commit the most heinous Murder, and, at the same time, to patronize the barbarous Practice of offering human Sacrifices. Now, it is impossible for the divine Being to enjoin a cruel and wicked Action; but to bid a Father under the pretence of sacrificing, inveigle his own Child to the Slaughter-house, and there butcher him with his own Hands, is what all the World must allow to be vile, and criminal in the highest degree. Therefore God who cannot be tempted with Evil, neither tempteth any Man, could not tempt *Abraham* in this manner. This is the Objection in its full force.

We admit that Murder is a heinous Sin, and that God cannot tempt to any thing that has the least Shadow of it. And what must be concluded hence? not, that *Abraham* was never tempted to slay his Son, for this would not only contradict this Passage in the Old Testament, but *St. Paul* and *James*, who take notice of this particular Instance as true, and what really was transacted. What shall we say then? The truth seems to be this. The

Phrase, God tempted *Abraham*, has been misunderstood and taken to signify, that the divine Being actually put him upon this Trial; whereas, it might better have been interpreted, That he permitted him to be tempted to it.

There are several like Instances in Scripture, where God is said to tempt Persons, which only import, that by his Permission they were tempted. Thus it is said, God moved *David* to number the People; that is, he suffered the grand Tempter to propose this vain Action to him. Again, he is said to put a lying Spirit into all *Ahab's* Prophets; that is, he permitted the Father of Lyes to deceive them. And how reasonably may we believe, that those that first abandon God, may be left by him to the furious Assaults of the Devil.

There are likewise Examples in holy Writ, where it is expressly said, Satan was permitted by God to tempt good Men. Such was *Job*, which appears a parallel Case with this under Consideration. *Job*, under the most intolerable Anguish and Affliction, maintain'd his Patience, Piety, and Devotion, and evinced to his malicious Accuser, that he served God out of a Principle of Virtue, and not merely from the Hope of Reward. So faithful *Abraham*, when tempted to offer up his own, his only Son, an Action the most contrary to Flesh and Blood, by his ready Obedience (supposing it a Command from Heaven) demonstrated, that there was not any thing,

thing, but he could comply with, out of love to God. And hence we may discern how *Abraham* came to be tempted.

He was a Man eminent and conspicuous for Faith, Piety, and an unblemished Character. Such an amiable Reputation, Malice, and Calumny are unwearied in assaulting: and where there is nothing real, something imaginary will be found to tarnish it. That it was *Abraham's* Lot to be falsely accused, seems probable; for thus is that Account introduced: *And it came to pass that God did try Abraham.* Now for his own Information, the divine Being had no occasion to try *Abraham*, for he perfectly knew, that he would sincerely and readily obey him; therefore, it must be upon some other View that he was tempted. And that this was to clear him from some invidious Reflection cast upon him, will, I hope, more fully appear, if we consider the Nature of *Abraham's* Trial.

That *Isaac* was his Father's Darling, and that he had a singular Value for him, could not but be observed from his severe Treatment of *Hagar*, and her Son *Ishmael* (for his childish Wagery in mocking *Isaac*) banishing him his Family, and exposing the Mother and Son, like Vagabonds, to Wretchedness and Want. This might give occasion for Scandal, and be perversly applied to traduce the good Patriarch, to call his Religion in question, and to suppose him so violently attached to his well-beloved

beloved Son *Isaac*, that at the Command even of God he would not resign him.

Therefore was he permitted to be tempted, that he might vindicate himself from so false an Accusation, and perhaps, at the same time, with a design to stop the Progress of an Affection running into an extreme.

But no sooner was this pious Father made sensible, that it was the Command of God that he should sacrifice his Son *Isaac*, but he looks upon it as an Act of Religion, and what he ought not to disobey. And now we see the once tender and compassionate Father standing armed for execution; his Hand stretch'd out to shed that Blood that was as dear to him as his own, and hereby undeniably testifying, that he could part with his Child readily, and with Cheerfulness at the Command of Heaven. To which let us add, that in that very critical Minute, the Angel of the Lord prevents the Tragedy, thereby abundantly declaring it an unlawful Action, and contrary to the Will of God.

From the whole, a Variety of useful and instructive Reflections may be drawn: As, that we ought to beware of too prevailing and strong a Passion for any of our dearest Enjoyments in this World, lest we provoke God to mortify us in it, or deprive us of it. That where any Action is in its own Nature bad, we may be sure the divine Being cannot tempt us to do it. That since Al-
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mighty God, in such a signal manner, prevented *Abraham* from offering up his Son, he openly discountenanc'd and condemn'd the Use of human Sacrifices. And lastly, we see the necessity of supernatural Revelation to preserve the best Men from Seduction; for it was owing to this, that *Isaac* was loosed from the Altar.

S E C T. III.

THE next Case I shall examine, that is exclaim'd against, is that of the Twin-Brothers, *Esau* and *Jacob*. The whole Scheme, say they, invented by *Rebecca*, and consented to by *Jacob*, of procuring the Blessing, was a deceitful and unjust Combination against *Esau*, and accomplish'd by all the base Arts of secret Diffimulation and open Lying. And that Providence should not only suffer a Man to carry away the Blessing, in such a clandestine cheating manner, but secure it to him, seems to represent God patronizing Deceit.

But certainly, this Story is capable of a much better Turn; and when we have gone thro' all the Particulars relating to it, I doubt not but it will appear in another Light.

Let us remember, that *Esau* had prophanelly slighted his Birth-Right, and sold it to his Brother for a Trifle; and therefore *Jacob* had really purchas'd the Advantages of Primogenitureship, and had a just Right to call himself *Isaac's* eldest Son, as by Contract he was

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to inherit all the Privileges which before appertain'd to *Eſau*. Therefore it can't be any Reflection upon Providence to ſecure to *Jacob* that, which his Brother had profanely contemned. But it may be ſaid, *Eſau* received no juſt Equivalent for the Advantages of Primogenitureſhip. Very true; he did not. And this clearly ſhows how little he valued the Bleſſing, ſeeing he ſold it for nothing. Hence, he is ſaid to deſpiſe it; and alſo is ſtil'd, by the great Apoſtle, in this Particular, a profane Perſon. Again it may be replied, *Eſau* was, at this time, at the point of Death: and Neceſſity forced him to come to the diſadvantageous Terms he did with his falſe Brother. He returned indeed from Hunting hungry and faint; nevertheless it is very improbable ſo rich and great a Man, as his Father *Iſaac*, ſhould be deſtitute of Proviſion for his Family; and one of his Sons muſt periſh of Famine, or purchaſe Food at the greateſt Expence to himſelf. Conſequently, he might have been ſupplied, if he would have exerciſed a little patience, much cheaper than at *Jacob's* hand. But by his Conduct, at this time, he appeared to reaſon like the Voluptuary and Sinner, who ſay, why ſhould we reſuſe the Importunity of a preſent urgent Inclination, in proſpect of ſome future Advantage? We may be annihilated, and then what good will the promiſed Rewards of hereafter do us?

Jacob,

Jacob, it must be granted, was highly criminal in proposing the Temptation. (It is very hard to imagine he durst have made the Offer, if he had not, one time or other, observed his Brother express a very great Slight of his Birth-Right.) He was equally culpable and blame-worthy, in deceiving the good old Man to confer the Blessing *Esau* had indeed signed over to him, but which *Isaac* design'd his Brother. And Providence scourged the Mother and the Son for their Deceit. *Jacob* was forced to quit his Father's House, and flee away to save his Life. And what a heavy Affliction was it to leave his Father? *Rebecca*, we may be sure, was sadly troubled to lose the Company of her Darling, to think what Hardships he might be exercised with abroad. And we can't but suppose he was reduced to great Straits when he reclined his Head at Night on the Stones; and that the Sense of the Evil he had committed smote him, and was ready to sink his Spirits; but that Providence, (lest he should have been swallowed up of over-much Sorrow) in token of the Acceptance of his Repentance, vouchsafed, in a Vision, to promise to return him to his own Land. But in the mean time he smarted in several Instances; and in such a manner, as he might plainly read his Sin in his Punishment. As every one may observe, who considers the whole of his History.

In one word : *Eſau* poured the profaneſt Contempt upon his Birth-Right, and was juſtly left to deprive himſelf ; *Jacob* took very irregular Steps to obtain it, and was puniſhed for his Diſſimulation and Craft. Therefore Providence is clear, and fairly treats *Eſau* and *Jacob* according to their Works. And let no Man henceforth take any indirect and wicked Courſe to procure his Right. If *Jacob* had told his pious Father the truth, how *Eſau* had ſold him the Bleſſing, and confirmed the Contract by a ſolemn Oath, the good Man would ſcarce have rejected his Plea. And further, this Story teaches Men to beware, how they profanely part with their greateſt Happineſs in Reverſion, for the ſake of the meaneſt Trifles in hand. It alſo ſhews us the Folly and Wickedneſs of thoſe, who expect to be put in poſſeſſion hereafter of thoſe Privileges they have parted with here. *Looking diligently, leſt any be a profane Perſon like Eſau, who for a Morſel of Meat ſold his Birth-Right : For you know, that afterwards when he would have inherited the Bleſſing, he was rejected : for he found no place for Repentance, tho' he ſought it carefully with Tears.*

S E C T. IV.

THE Plunder the *Iſraelites* made of the *Egyptians*, is accounted by ſome Perſons an Act of Fraud and Injuſtice, and they don't ſee

see how the divine Being can countenance, much less command any such thing.

But if we attend to the several Particulars of this History, what they obtained of the *Egyptians* (we shall find) was but a small part of the Sum-Total, they had a just right to demand of them.

Let us consider, how the Jews came at first to make a Settlement in *Egypt*, and we shall find, they were invited thither by one of their Kings, not only out of Gratitude to *Joseph*, one of their Brethren, and his prime Minister, (who had saved the Kingdom from the Jaws of a dreadful Famine, and had greatly enrich'd it;) but no doubt, with a prudent Foresight of strengthening his own Hands, by the addition of such a number of valuable Persons. This we may suppose was *Pharaoh's* Opinion; and accordingly, during his Reign, they became a very wealthy and flourishing People; but another King succeeding, wanting in Humanity, as well as Prudence, treated them with all manner of bad Usage, plundering them of their whole, and making a free People Slaves; yea, such was the outrageous Oppression and Tyranny they groan'd under, that they were obliged by their barbarous Task-Masters to their full Tale of Bricks, tho' (against Reason) they were denied proper Materials for making them. And all this perhaps, that they might have the pleasure of

giving them a cruel Whipping, for not doing Impossibilities.

Farther, they destroyed their Male-Children, and denied them the Exercise of their Religion; and all this, under the vile, uncharitable, malignant pretence, that in time, if not curbed, they would become more powerful than themselves. Now, will any one say, that all the Riches of *Egypt* were a sufficient recompence for such terrible Sufferings? Surely then if there be a righteous God in Heaven, it is high time for him to vindicate the Innocent, and humble the proud Oppressor. And behold, arrayed in Terror, and clothed with Power and Majesty, he appears in those wonderous Plagues he brought upon the *Egyptians*, till he had consum'd them, with their King, and deliver'd his People.

So that consider but the Jews as Servants, they had a right to much more than they had borrowed of the *Egyptians*; or as Enemies, and in a State of War with that Nation, (and upon the most justifiable Account too) and then Fraud becomes Stratagem, and Violence lawful and commendable.

Hence, we may be instructed in some of the most divine Morals; as, that we never violate the Laws of Hospitality and Gratitude; that we never through Malice or Envy trample upon others; that we don't rigorously exact that Work, which Men have not Strength to perform. That when a Nation is grown notoriously

notoriously oppressive, cruel, and unrighteous, Providence usually visits it with the most heavy and dreadful Plagues. And finally, that God is engaged to see those that do wrong make Restitution: And this may animate us to Patience under Injuries.

S E C T. V.

THE Entry of the *Israelites* into *Canaan* is reflected upon as an illegal Invasion made on the Property of others, their War with the *Canaanites* as unjust, and the utter Extirpation of them as cruel beyond all parallel. Therefore it is not to be suppos'd, that the kind Father of the Universe should authorise such an unrighteous and cruel Attempt, and support and prosper it with a Series of Miracles.

Those that take the liberty to talk in such a manner, whatever they pretend, don't impartially enquire into and weigh the Merits of the Cause. For it is not to be denied, that when the Inhabitants of a Land have sold themselves to work Wickedness, and alienated the divine Care, God may punish them as he sees proper.

It is also evident, that as God is a Being that always acts in perfect Conformity to the good of the Universe, he will so bring about the Destruction of those that have fitted themselves

selves for Ruin, as thereby to promote Virtue and Happiness.

Now it is expressly said, the full-grown Wickedness of the *Canaanites*, and their insufferable Enormities, render'd it necessary they should be cut off.

Still the divine Being would not begin the Catastrophe of this dissolute People, but in such a manner, as their Crimes might visibly appear to be the Reason of their Overthrow, hereby to strike the deepest Horror into the Minds of those who should succeed them in the Land: and that the *Israelites* might even be terrified at the bare mention of those Sins, upon the account of which, they had been made the Executioners of such dreadful Vengeance. And thus at once, we clearly see why God punished those Nations in so dismal a manner, and why the Jews were made the Instruments of it.

Yet, lest this Instance should give any Shadow or Colour for an unwarrantable Invasion of the Territories and Possessions of others, and to the beginning of an unjust War, we must in this Instance consider Almighty God as their immediate King, and who as General gave out particular and frequent Orders, how the Tribes should proceed in this War. So that in this Case, there could be no fear of going beyond the Bounds of what was just and right, they having infinite Justice and Goodness to direct.

Almighty

Almighty Power was likewise imploy'd in their behalf; for it was rather by his omnipotent Arm, than any human Strength, that the *Canaanites* were destroy'd.

However, such was the divine Clemency, that when he was forced to come to Extremities, even then he mixed Mercy with Vengeance, and cut off no more by the Edge of the Sword, than those that were the Inhabitants of the Cities the *Israelites* were to dwell in. And though the Execution seems to have been very severe with respect to these, yet, we may be assured their Crimes deserved the Punishment; and farther, that it was necessary to keep the Jews from running into their Abominations. But as to the rest of the Nations that lay around them, they were to offer Terms of Peace, before they drew the Sword.

When thou comest nigh unto a City to fight against it, then proclaim Peace unto it; and it shall be, if it make thee an answer of Peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be that all the People that are found therein shall be Tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. And if it will make no Peace with thee, but will make War against thee, then thou shalt besiege it. And when the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thy Hands, thou shalt smite every Male, but the Women, the Little Ones, and the Cattle, thou shalt take unto thyself.

Thus Almighty God, by a Series of Miracles, carried on this Expedition against the *Canaanites*,

Canaanites, to make all the World sensible, that it was he himself that drove out the Nations. And since the Extirpation of the wicked Inhabitants of *Canaan* was for moral Reasons, and the Interest of Virtue, it was worthy of the Interposition of Heaven. Now all the Miracles wrought in favour of the Jews, and which made them victorious over their Enemies, were design'd to spread the Knowledge of the true God, and to influence the rest of Mankind to fear, love, and serve him. For how helpless and despicable must the Idols and false Gods of the Heathen appear to them, while they saw and heard the mighty Things wrought for his People by the God of *Israel*? And how proper was this to cause them to renounce their Idolatry, and join themselves to those that worship this great King?

From this Account of the Destruction of the impious *Canaanites*, we see how odious, hateful, and intolerable all Wickedness, and particularly Idolatry is in the sight of God. How dangerous it is for any People to grow profane, luxurious, and unclean. We may likewise observe, that when the divine Being is, after long Forbearance, forced to shower down his Judgments, he executes this his strange Work, in the properest manner, to teach the remaining Inhabitants of the World Righteousness. Therefore Men ought not to punish Criminals merely for Punishment's sake,

fake; but to deter the rest of Mankind, and secure the Interest of Virtue.

S E C T. VI.

AS for the Moral Law, it is such an excellent Epitome of the Rules of Virtue, as very well merited to be usher'd into the World with that awful Solemnity, that stern and terrible Pomp which awaited it, that not only commanded immediate Reverence, but should impress for the future a lasting awe upon the Mind of those that saw it. Who could raise such a dreadful Scene of Horror and cloath *Sinai's* Top with Blackness and Darknes, with flaming Lightnings, majestick Thunders, and smoaking Tempests, but he alone who makes the Clouds his Chariots, and rides on the Wings of the Winds? How dangerous then must it be, to break those Precepts, that were delivered with such extraordinary Marks of the divine Presence, and by the Mouth of God?

Hence the special Respect of the supreme Mind to the Rules of Morality is evident. For in this Method he set a particular Emphasis upon them, and gave them a most distinct and remarkable Enforcement.

The ceremonial Rites were set as Fences, to preserve Men from running into the superstitious Customs of idolatrous Nations, and steady in the Duties of Moral Virtue. They were Types of the Messiah, and were of great
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service in cutting out Work for a People, that otherwise would have been much worse employed; but they were never appointed to be rested in as real Religion, and those that entertain'd any such false Notions were always condemned.

The great Design of the Prophets was to instruct the *Jews* in the Meaning and End of the Ceremonials of their Worship, and to foretel his Advent who should abolish these Figures, and bring in everlasting Righteousness, or advance Virtue to the noblest Pitch.

In one word, the Oeconomy settled amongst the *Jews*, well coincided with the Exigencies of those Times; and as Almighty God presided over them, and was their King, no less could be expected, than that he would give them repeated demonstrations of his Presence, and often make bare his holy Arm, and bring Salvation and Triumph to them.

Who else was able to dry up the Swellings of *Jordan*, and stop its rapid Streams, when it overflowed all its Banks? Who could cause the Walls of a strong fortify'd Town to fall to the Ground, merely with the sound of Trumpets, and the shouting of the People, save the God of *Israel*? These with many other Instances of his Almighty Power recorded in the Books of the old Testament, sufficiently vindicate their divine Authority.

S E C T. VII.

A MIRACLE is an Effect, which exceeds the Power of human Nature to produce, and is wrought in Confirmation of a Person's Mission and Doctrine. Whether such supernatural Operations be the Product of divine or diabolical Power, must be discover'd by a just Examination of the Nature of the Doctrine they are brought to enforce and establish.

If it be any way trifling or immoral, if it be contrary to the known Perfections of God; if it do not evidently advance the Knowledge and Happiness of Mankind, ten thousand Miracles will not evince its divine Authority. For God cannot act inconsistently with his own Attributes, and unworthy of them: he cannot address himself to us, to engage us in Error and Irreligion, in Folly and Vice.

If the Doctrine be wise and good, virtuous and holy, Miracles then impress its Divinity, and testify their own Original. For Satan cannot act for the Interest of Religion and Virtue; except we can suppose him endeavouring to overturn his own Kingdom.

Hence, it plainly follows, that Miracles, wrought in Confirmation of such a Doctrine, are by a divine Power, and that the Revelation consequent upon 'em is the Will of God.

Thus the most exceptionable Passages, in the Old Testament, have been consider'd, and

I hope, in some measure clear'd from those Difficulties they seem at the first view to be load-
ed with, and so not unworthy of God accompa-
nying them with Miracles.

As the Predictions of the *Jewish* Prophets, were accomplish'd in the Abolition of the Ce-
remonial Law, it is manifest, that Dispensa-
tion was all along a proper Apparatus, for
the Reception of our blessed Lord and Saviour.
And therefore the New is not opposed to, or
in any wise contradicts the Old Testament.
For the Gospel was always intended by the
Law and the Prophets, and *came to fulfil them.*
This brings us to inquire into the divine Wri-
tings of Christ and his Apostles.

S E C T. VIII.

THE Religion of Jesus, is that Discovery
of our Duty and Happiness, God has vouch-
safed to Mankind, by his blessed Son our Lord.
The Doctrine of this Revelation is most agree-
able to our Condition, its Precepts containing
the most exalted Morals ; the Motives, where-
with it enforces Obedience, are the most pow-
erful, and the whole was confirmed by unde-
niable Miracles.

The Doctrine of our Lord is most suitable
to the State of Sinners : as it is an Act of
Grace in favour of Rebels, that will submit
and lay down the Weapons of Disloyalty ; and
a Proclamation of Pardon to all, upon the easy
Terms

Terms of abandoning their past Sins, and being sincerely obedient to the Will of God for the time to come: which is the Import of believing in Christ. For when we really assent to him, as our Lord and Saviour, we shall be subject to his Laws and Government.

The Ground and Foundation of the Redemption of Sinners, was the unmerited and amazing Love of God to Mankind: *God so loved the World, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him might not perish, but have everlasting Life.* This was an Act of pure Charity and Goodness. For we had done nothing to deserve it: and therefore could have no Right to demand it. This is all that St. Paul means, where he saith, *By Grace ye are saved through Faith, and that not of your selves; it is the Gift of God.* Grace here signifies Favour, and Faith the Gospel: and therefore, the blessed Apostle tells us that it was infinite Bounty which proposed to us the Terms of Salvation through the Gospel: for we contributed nothing towards procuring this Act of Grace, this Offer of Pardon; no, this is wholly the Gift of God. He likewise repeats the same thing, in those Words, *Not by Works of Righteousness that we have done,* (did we bring Almighty God under any Obligation to give us a remedying Covenant) *but of his Mercy, he hath put us into a Possibility of Salvation.* Hence we may learn, that it is not the Doctrine of the Gospel, that Man shall be saved,

saved, without the sincere Observation of the Virtues of a good Life. The perfect Righteousness and Sufferings of Christ were to do honour to the first Covenant, satisfy for Man's Violation of it, and that God might propose to Mankind Terms of everlasting Life, suited to their present debilitated Powers, and maintain the sacredness of his Government. It would have been unworthy of God, and his Love of Virtue, to have wholly past by and forgiven the Violators of his Law: because this would have encourag'd future Rebellion, and expos'd his Authority to Slight and Contempt.

It is plain our Lord's Undertakings were not, to satisfy for any Man's want of sincere Righteousness; for it is clear, that this is the Requirement of the Gospel, and absolutely necessary to Salvation: which if we do not perform, we are wretched and undone for ever; because there remains no more Sacrifice for Sin, but a fearful Expectation of Judgment and fiery Indignation.

What Christ did, and suffer'd, was to free Mankind from the Demands of that Law, which requir'd sinless and perfect Obedience, and which they were become unable to pay. It is therefore a wicked and groundless Misrepresentation of this glorious Gospel, to assert that it sets some Men at liberty, to live as they please, and at last crowns them with eternal Happiness; whilst others are left to perish without hope of Escape, and are even in no better

better State, nor have a fairer Chance, than the Devils; *who are reserv'd in Chains, under Darkness, unto the Judgment of the great Day.* This represents the best-natur'd and most generous Religion in the World, morose, and churlish, unworthy to be esteemed of divine Authority: and in short, tramples under foot the Son of God, accounts the Blood of the Covenant an unholy thing, and puts him who shed it to open Shame.

S E C T. IX.

THE Precepts of the Gospel are incomparably the best in the World. They enjoin the most rational Piety towards the divine Being, the most extensive Benevolence and God-like Charity and Goodness towards all Men, and the most strict Temperance and Chastity in the Government of our selves: and require us to think upon and practice whatsoever Things are true, venerable, just, pure, lovely, and of good Report.

These divine Morals, are enforc'd with the most glorious and inconceivable Rewards, to be eternally enjoy'd in the future State: Eye hath not seen, Ear hath not heard, neither hath it enter'd into the Heart of Man to conceive the Things, that God hath prepar'd for them that love him. Vice, on the other hand, is threatned with the most dire and everlasting Torments: with weeping, wailing and gnashing
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of Teeth, under the most acute stings of a never-dying Worm, and the intolerable Torments of inextinguishable Fire.

None is to be compar'd to the Christian Scheme, for powerfully touching those sensible Springs of human Actions, the Hopes and Fears of Mankind: none is like it, for administering Comfort to true Penitents, neither is there any equally adapted to our Relief, of what nature soever our Troubles may be.

S E C T. X.

IT was every way consistent with the Divine Wisdom and Goodness, to grant Mankind a Redeemer. For God did not think fit, that the whole Race should be destroy'd, and the Name of Man be blotted out from under Heaven, for the Sin of Adam; nor that they should be brought into the World, under a Law of Trial, by which they must inevitably fall and perish.

Yet, before Pardon could be offer'd, offended Justice must be satisfied: and this our Lord undertook for us, and compleated. And here in the Goodness and Wisdom of Man's Redemption appears clear and conspicuous, worthy of the supreme Mind and Perfections.

It was infinite Goodness in the Father, to send his only begotten Son on such an Errand: and the highest Wisdom, to chuse such a Person to finish this mighty Work, as was the
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express Image of his Person, and the Brightness of his Glory: qualified not only to make Atonement for Sin, but to set before Men a perfect Example of Virtue and Goodness: instructing them in real Religion by his Life, as well as Doctrine; and abundantly evidencing to the World, the high Value he set upon Mankind and their Happiness, which consisted in their being Virtuous. This calls for the most exalted Gratitude.

At his Advent, one part of the World was drown'd in Hypocrisy, another sunk into the grossest Idolatry; and the whole lay under the Dominion of Ignorance, Sensuality, and Wickedness. All the Attempts of the Law, of the Prophets, and of the Philosophers, were unsuccessful in redressing the Vices and Follies of Men. It was necessary therefore, some other Method should be used to reclaim Sinners, and this was the Method our Lord took, that is recorded in the New Testament. And that it was the most excellent and effectual, I doubt not, but it will appear to every impartial Judge.

The one Sacrifice Christ offer'd up of himself, upon the Altar of the Cross, satisfied the Honour of the violated Law of God, secur'd his Authority from being trampled upon, procur'd Remission of Sins for all true Penitents; and at the same time, abolished the bloody Sacrifices, and all the Rites both of Jews and Gentiles; for in this manner, all Foundation of their Use was taken away.

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What means could be invented more proper, to wean Men from resting in external Performances, than the great Law of Christian Sincerity, than the sublime Morals taught, exemplify'd, and inculcated, by our blessed Lord, upon the noble Principles of universal Benevolence and Charity, of Love to God and all Men, and from the Prospect of eternal Rewards?

In one word, if we look the Religion of Jesus thorough again, and again, we find every thing worthy of God, highly instructive and perfective of human Reason, most conducive to the establishment of solid Virtue and Goodness, and consequently, no way below him to reveal by his Son, and to confirm with the most mighty Works.

If it be ask'd, why was not this divine Revelation made sooner, than about seventeen hundred Years ago? The Answer is: For wise and good Reasons, known only to God, who surely may bestow his Favours after what manner, and in what season he pleases, without giving an Account to any one. But what does this alter the Case? since God hath all along treated with Mankind, as under this Covenant of Grace and Favour.

Altogether as impertinent is the Enquiry, Why has not the divine Being made Christianity universally known? We might as well ask why he has not set People in different Circumstances, and why he has not made all their Capacities equal? But what is all this to the
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the Purpose? since he expects an Improvement only in proportion to the Gift.

S E C T. XI.

THUS the Nature and Design of the Christian Scheme, being viewed in its native and original Beauty, appears so fair and heavenly a Piece, as well deserv'd to be introduc'd, propagated and confirm'd, by so many, and mighty Miracles. And now if we grant that credit to the holy Apostles, which is due to faithful and impartial Historians; (and there is no reason in all the World, why we should refuse them this) the Facts they relate, and which have been acknowledg'd even by their Enemies, very true, will account for themselves, whether they could be of Man, or they must be of God.

It must be the utmost Weakness or Malice, that can so much as pretend to deny the good Evangelists the Character of careful and exact Historians. For they had not their Story at the second or third hand, or at a considerable distance; but they relate what they heard, saw done, and what they acted themselves. There were Multitudes concern'd nearly in observing every thing they did or said, that it was just and agreeable to Truth. They wrote their History, very near the Time, when the Things they have recorded were done; and every one had a fair Opportunity of knowing

the Certainty of them. Nevertheless from that Age to this, it never could be shewn, that in any one Instance, they reported what was false or doubtful. Other Historians, who writ at, or near the Time of the Apostles, whenever they mention their Affairs, tho' inveterate Enemies to their Cause, yet accord in the Truth and Reality of the Facts. Now, since no Argument can be form'd against the Certainty of the Gospel Facts, but what serves equally to overthrow the Truth of all other History, we must allow their Verity, and they will demonstrate the divine Authority of the New Testament.

For who could he be, but the Son of God, who was conceiv'd in a different manner from the rest of Men : who had his Birth celebrated with the most extraordinary Appearances, even of the heavenly Host singing Praises to the most High, saying, *Glory to God in the highest, on Earth, Peace, Good-Will towards Men?* Was he not more than Man, who at twelve Years of Age disputed with the Jewish Doctors, and Rabbi's, with so much Understanding and Judgment, that all the People were astonish'd? Who but a divine Person could unfold the Secrets of Heaven, state the Terms of Man's Acceptance with Almighty God ; and in confirmation of his Mission, in his Discourses, frequently refer to the Prophecies of the Old Testament, shewing their Accomplishment in him? What must he be, that could give Eyes
to

to the Blind, Feet to the Lame, could raise the Dead to Life, cast out Devils, and make all Things, even the Seas and Storms, obey him?

Were twelve illiterate Fishermen likely to carry on and accomplish any vast Design? Yet such our blessed Lord chose to accompany him in his benevolent Travels, and assured them after his Sufferings and Resurrection, he would endue them with Power, and employ them to spread his Religion in the World.

He rose again exactly on the Day he had predicted, he meets with and comforts his dispirited and heartless Disciples, encouraging them to preach his glorious Gospel. For this he qualified them, by the plentiful Effusion of the Holy Ghost upon them, he enabled them to contend with *Jews*, and *Gentiles*: to plead and defend their Cause with Undauntedness before Rulers and Kings: and to propagate Christianity, with invincible Resolution and miraculous Speed, thorough the World, in spite of the Rage and Fierceness of Men and Devils, and to seal their Testimony with their dearest Blood.

These, these Facts vindicate the Gospel, against all Cavilling, Scepticism and Levity. Its Foundation stands sure, till the Certainty of these Things can be disproved. But all Endeavoursthis way, either from antient or modern Enemies, have hitherto proved unsuccessful, and will do so to the End of Time.

S E C T. XII.

THAT the several Books of the Old and New Testament are canonical, were embraced as the Rule of Faith and Manners, and were writ by the Persons to whom they are ascrib'd, we surely learn, from the unanimous Consent of Tradition, and the Testimony of the Church: And this is all the Evidence we can have of the Authenticness of any ancient Book, and it would be exceeding unreasonable, and absurd, to require, and expect more.

The Age wherein the sacred Scriptures were penned, was as sure who writ such and such a Book, as we can be, of any Author who publishes in our own Time. And seeing the Persons that lived in the Days of *Moses* and the Prophets, of Christ and his Apostles, must know what Books they indited; they told it the next Generation; that, the succeeding; and so the holy Scriptures have been convey'd down all along, as Writings of divine Inspiration, and an infallible Rule both of Doctrine and Manners.

The Church is hence stiled the Pillar. and Ground of Truth, as she is the Repository in which those divine Oracles are preserv'd, that are the Guide and the Judge of Men's Lives. Though we discover by Tradition, the Canon of the Scriptures; and what Books were received as the Rule of Faith and Duty, and which

which were held doubtful: yet, it does not follow, we must learn by the Traditions of the Church, wherein the Nature of Christianity consists, and make these the great Measures of our Thoughts and Actions. It is enough to be informed by Tradition, that what Christ and his holy Apostles taught, are writ in the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles. For then we can turn to these Books and study them, as the best and safest Method of becoming rightly acquainted with the Religion of Jesus. No doubt, but since the Apostles could speak to be understood, they would write so, as to be plain and intelligible, and not wrap their Sense in Mystery and Darknes, so as to want a strong Body of oral Traditions to drag them out of their Obscurity, and give a meaning to their Words. For if they wrote in such a manner, they might as well have not writ at all. But this is too scandalous a Reflection to be cast upon wise Men, much more upon inspired Divines.

Now, since the Apostles committed the Gospel to writing, and must write so as to be understood; or otherwise defeat and abuse the very Design of writing; it wou'd be a most odd, uncertain, and imperfect Manner of obtaining Instruction, merely to depend on this, such a one told such a one, and he again told another, and so on through seventeen Centuries, that such a thing was Christ's Doctrine.

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Now, since the Apostles committed the Gospel to writing, and must write so as to be understood; or otherwise defeat and abuse the very Design of writing; it wou'd be a most odd, uncertain, and imperfect Manner of obtaining Instruction, merely to depend on this, such a one told such a one, and he again told another, and so on through seventeen Centuries, that such a thing was Christ's Doctrine.

Instead

Instead of such an infinite Series of doubtful and very-much-to-be-mistrusted Hearsays, a Book is given into our Hand, well attested to be an exact Copy of the Original, which they writ, whose Doctrine we would understand; for it has been kept sacred, and deliver'd down from Age to Age, genuine and authentic: therefore the surest way of knowing their real Principles must be with Diligence and Impartiality, with Care and Seriousness, to peruse the Book.

The Doctrine of our blessed Lord, contain'd in the Writings of the Apostles, has not been corrupted or changed from what it was at first. For such a Concern have Mankind had with these Books, that they have always kept a jealous Eye one upon another, lest any should adulterate them. And as they are of divine Authority, we cannot question but Providence itself has been peculiarly concern'd, to keep these pure and entire.

The sacred Books were spread abroad early, in innumerable Copies; and in as many Translations as there were Languages in the World. And Men being convinced of their heavenly Extraction, and divine Original, imploy'd them as the infallible Standard of Truth, and Orthodoxy, and the Measure of all human Opinions. Hence, they became quoted almost in all Books, and every body got them into their own hands. And now suppose there were some Persons bold and wicked enough to
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attempt to foist into them their own Doctrines or Opinions; or to erase any thing that was considerable out of them, there would have been thousands ready and willing to have detected the horrid Cheat. It is morally impossible any such Alteration should be conceal'd, neither would such flagrant Prophaneness, against a Book so justly held sacred, pass uncensur'd.

It is no way probable, nor can be supposed, that in any Age all Men should at once agree to new-model the sacred Book: because no Time hath been, when all Men were of one and the same Mind. For there always have been different Opinions, and every one striving to prove his Right by the Scriptures. Therefore these religious Struggles and Disputes have been a manifest Preservative of the Purity of the Bible.

Finally, we cannot doubt, but divine Providence has carefully guarded the inspired Writings. For Almighty God, who saw convenient to publish his Works to the World, by the Hand of so glorious a Messenger as his own Son, who was at no small Expence thereabout, will certainly never suffer them to be defac'd, in any material Branch, by the pious Frauds and Villany of Men. And we have Reason to reckon it very signal and remarkable, that in the endless Number of Copys, and Versions, the various Readings are so few, the Sense so

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little disturbed, and not altered in any Point of Moment and Importance.

These divine Writings are the standing Means of reclaiming Sinners: and if we refuse to hear them, we shall not be persuaded, tho' one came from the Dead to preach to us. Let us therefore seriously consult them, as they alone demonstrate to us the Way of Salvation, and our Charter to eternal Life.



CHAP.



C H A P. V.

*Of Hell's Torments, and the Joys
of Heaven.*

S E C T. I.

TH E R E are many Considerations, which may convince us, that it is in vain to expect any Abatements in the execution of the divine Threatnings, and that Men that continue impenitent will find Hell eternal, in the justest Import of the Term.

The Habits the Soul hath, when it goes out of the Body, it takes into another World. It is evident, that whatever Men have accustomed themselves unto, those Inclinations and Propensities continue firm to the last, and do adhere to the Soul in its State of Separation. Upon this Principle, that the Soul carries with it those Dispositions it contracts here, into the invisible State, are built all those Exhortations to root out of the Mind all vile Affections, and to cultivate in it all the Habits of Virtue and Holiness. And it is as manifest, that the prevailing Desires we have in this World, accom-

pany us into the next, as that we either can do any thing towards making ourselves *Vessels of Wrath*, or towards being disposed for *Glory*. For what signifies it, whether our Temper be good or bad, in respect to another World, if we shall have quite other Dispositions, when we leave this State, than we had whilst we were in it? It must therefore be granted, that the present predominant Habits of the Soul will attend it into the other World.

Consequently, that Soul, whose Habits are evil, shall enter into a Place of Torment. For as it is vicious, it can have no Relish for the chaste and virtuous Pleasures of Heaven; but its Desires must be carried after those Gratifications it enjoy'd here. And finding no possibility of obtaining them there, (being removed into a State of Exile from whatever is dear to it) of course, it must be intolerably punish'd by its ardent but hopeless Longings.

A Sinner repeats his Crime in the sight of God, as often as he with pleasure recollects his former wicked Actions; and it is not the want of Inclination, but of Ability and Opportunity, that restrains him from committing those Sins he has been reviewing with satisfaction, which shews Vice stamp'd *even upon the very Soul*.

A Man going out of the World under the Power of evil Habits, leaving all that ever were pleasant to him behind, must necessarily be under exquisite Pain in the absence of those agreeable Entertainments. Therefore the Ground

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of his Torment is laid in his own Soul, and the Misery he endures arises from his bad Dispositions. And seeing a Man may, and frequently does repeat his Crimes, by calling them over again with pleasure, and longing after them: much more then does that Soul do this, that in another World hath those eager Hankerings after its old and beloved criminal Delights, which vex it to distraction, because it is in a State of Separation from them. Consequently, that main Objection against the Eternity of Hell's Torments signifies nothing; *viz.* How it can be consistent with the Equity and Goodness of the divine Being, to inflict eternal Punishments for temporal Crimes? No, they are as eternal as the Torments; and the Eternity of the Torments arise out of the eternal Repetition of Mens darling Vices, in Inclination and Desire.

S E C T. II.

IT has already been made appear, that the Habits the Soul is possess'd of when it leaves the Body, go with it into the next Life, and that if these Dispositions be evil, it must necessarily enter into Torment. It has also been farther argued, That Sinners repeat their Crimes, as often as they act them over in a pleas'd Imagination; and that in Hell there is such a Repetition, because there they have the same vicious Inclinations they had. And therefore

fore it is false to say temporal Crimes are punish'd with eternal Torments; for the Crime is as eternal as the Punishment. To prove which, nothing needs to be done farther but to show, that the vicious Affections a Man goes with into another World, will continue in his Soul for ever.

The Stress which is laid upon reforming Mens evil Habits, in this World, imports they are not to be rectified in the other.

Why should God have sent his Son into the World to amend Mankind, and why is our Lord so very urgent with them to repent instantly and without delay, if they may repent and correct their vile Dispositions in the future State? At this rate, the divine Being must take improper Measures with Sinners. For if they are so easy to be reclaim'd by Punishments hereafter, it would be as wise and good to send them thither quickly, that so they may be the sooner reclaim'd.

Yet, by the way, methinks, those Gentlemen that suppose the Wicked may be reformed by the Torments of another World; will find they are a little inconsistent with themselves; for they will hardly allow that Virtue, which proceeds from fear of future Punishment. How then can they attribute so much Value to that Repentance, which is occasion'd merely by the actual Sense and Experience of those Torments, as to think that it may, at any time, be accepted to the Release of the Sufferers?

But

But to return. How shall those Men repent, from whom all the means of Repentance are withdrawn? If those powerful Arguments they had once used with them would not prevail to subdue their Lusts, how will they conquer their vicious Habits, when they shall have no Assistance; and when both the Motives and Opportunity of doing it are gone for ever?

Once more. This World is the State of our Trial; and the next, that of our Recompence. That here we are Probationers, is allowed by all. And that when once we have acted our Parts upon the Stage of Time, our Candidateship for Glory will be over, is equally clear and undeniable.

Finally. It is recorded in Sacred Writ, this shall be pronounced on the ungodly and impenitent, *He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still.* Thus, as the Mind will be possessed of its corrupt Dispositions, and act ever its Sins in Inclination and Will for ever, so it cannot but be tormented for ever and ever. Therefore those Texts that assert the Eternity of Hell's Torments, mean a real and proper Eternity: not any indefinite, but an endless Duration of Misery and Pain.

There can't be more strong Terms invented, to express the eternal Continuation of any thing, than those that are used concerning Hell's Torments. *These shall go away into everlasting*

everlasting Punishment. They shall never come out thence. Their Worm dieth not, neither is their Fire quenched. The Smoak of their Torments shall ascend up for ever and ever. And they shall be punish'd with everlasting Destruction.

Everlasting Destruction will not bear to be interpreted, *everlasting Annihilation*. For after the utter Extinction of one's Being, there remains no Subject of Misery. But this is such Destruction as is exerted upon a sensible Object, because he is said to be punished with it for ever and ever. And Destruction is used not only by the sacred, but also by prophane Authors, to express the entire Ruin of a Man's Interests, and his becoming consummately wretched.

In short; Spotless Holiness and absolute Goodness can in no way encourage moral Evil. But if the divine Being should be found insincere in his Threatnings, this would bring his Authority and Government under Contempt; and give Encouragement to the Revolt of other Beings into Rebellion, Vice, and Misery.

Now, although the Term *everlasting* is used in some Instances for an indefinite Duration; yet, I hope, the foregoing Arguments laid together will satisfy us, that when it is apply'd to the Torments of Hell, it must import an endless Duration, and fully persuade us to believe, the Sufferings of the Damn'd shall be really and absolutely eternal.

§ E C T.

S E C T. III.

IN respect to the eternal Duration of the Joys of Heaven, there can scarce be any Objection formed or Dispute raised: so clear a Prospect have all good Men, of being possess'd of a Happiness without end, and really eternal in the Heavens, after they once make their Exit off this Stage of Trial and Affliction.

That the Soul naturally is immortal, see Chap. 2. Sect. 4. Since nothing but entire Happiness reigns in Heaven, Virtue must be perfect there; because as far as there is any Degree of Sin, so far there will be Misery. But where Beings are compleat in Goodness, they are got beyond the power of Temptation, being already tryed and found faithful. Now where Men are immortal, perfect in Goodness, and above Temptation, they are secur'd in their eternal Happiness.

The sacred Books assert the Eternity of the Joys of Heaven, in a great variety of Expressions; by *an incorruptible Inheritance, a never-fading Crown, a House eternal in the Heavens, a Kingdom that cannot be moved, a City that hath Foundations, and by Fulness of Joy and Pleasures for evermore.*

The Pleasures of Heaven are the most divine, solid, and substantial; founded in the Virtue and Perfection of the Possessors, in the Sincerity of their Affection one to another,

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and in the more immediate Vision and Fruition of God's Presence and Favour. *But it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, being transformed into his Image, and shall see him as he is.*

These shall go away into everlasting Punishment; but the Righteous into Life eternal. Thus, we may be convinced of the Eternity of Hell's Torments, and of the Joys of Heaven.

Since Men shall enter upon everlasting Happiness or Misery, according as the Dispositions of their Minds are wicked or good, they ought above all things to beware, what Habits they contract and indulge. Have a care of all evil Affections, as things which will for ever exclude you from Heaven, and confine you with Devils in those Regions of Sorrow and Misery from whence there's no Redemption.

If Mankind were not strangely thoughtless and inconsiderate, stupid and bewitch'd, all the Pleasures, Profits, and Honours of the World would never induce them to forfeit the Joys of Heaven, and plunge them into endless Woe and Torment.

O what an intolerable and aggravating Circumstance of those bitter Sufferings is it, to know they are eternal! *Who can dwell with everlasting Burnings! who can dwell with devouring Fire! Knowing the Terrors of the Lord, we persuade Men.* It cuts us to our
very

very Hearts, to think that any should be so foolish, as for the momentary Pleasures of Sin to run headlong into eternal Condemnation,

To conclude; Since Men have everlasting Felicity annex'd to their Duty, let no Temptations seduce them to quit their Hope of so great and lasting a Reward; but maintain your Ground against all the Efforts of your Enemies; and *being found faithful unto Death, you shall receive a Crown of immortal Glory.*





A Discourse concerning the ME-
DIATOR between GOD and
Men.

I TIM. ii. 5.

*And one Mediator between God and
Men.*

THE blessed Apostle, recommending all Men to our Prayers, enforces this Duty from the Consideration that there is but one God, who is the Father, and wills the Salvation of all; and who for the sake of this gave his only-begotten Son out of his Bosom: *I exhort therefore, that first of all Supplications, Prayers, Intercessions, and giving of Thanks be made for all Men.—For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who would have all Men to be saved, and come to the Knowledge of the Truth. For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and Men.*

Men. My Design is, at this time, from the Words of my Text to prove, that after Man had sinned, a Mediator betwixt God and Men was become necessary, and then consider the excellent Ends and Purposes this serves.

Since I shall in the following Discourse make use of the Terms *Satisfaction*, *Mediator*, and *Sacrifice*, I shall endeavour first to explain their Meaning.

Satisfaction is a Recompence made to another for some Wrong which hath been done, or for an Affront offer'd him. The supreme Being is indeed, by virtue of the absolute Perfection of his Nature, incapable of suffering any Injury; therefore *Satisfaction*, when apply'd to him, can't be understood the Reparation of any Loss or Damage. But though he's infinitely above receiving any Harm, yet he can't but have Sin, or the wilful Disobedience of reasonable Creatures to the Laws of their Nature, in the utmost abhorrence. Consequently he must one way or other express his Dislike of it. *Satisfaction*, in this case, means, that the Sinner shall endure the just Punishment of his Transgression; if there be none to repair the Honour of the Law which he has violated, and to purchase for him Conditions of Forgiveness.

He who undertakes this Work is properly stiled *the Mediator between God and Men*; because he, by the perfect Obedience of his Life, answers the Requirements of the Law of innocent

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nocent Nature, and by his Sufferings and Death atones for Man's wilful Breach of it; whereby the Deity, without winking at Sin, which he can't do, propounds new Terms of Acceptance, which we, in our lapsed State, have Ability to perform: And thus God and Men are reconciled by the Man Christ Jesus.

He made his righteous Soul an Offering for Sin; or by his Passion repaired the Honour of the Law of spotless Obedience, which Man had broken; rendering it consistent with the divine Perfections and Government, to offer Conditions of Pardon and Acceptance with himself to Mankind, upon their Conformity to which, he is reconcil'd to them: and so is really and properly an expiatory and propitiatory Sacrifice.

Here it will be natural to enquire, how it is agreeable with the infinite Rectitude and Justice of the divine Mind to transfer the Punishment from the Offender to the Innocent? In the Case before us, the innocent Person is one that has his Life entirely in his own Dispose, he truly esteems doing good and procuring a Possibility of Salvation to innumerable Souls an Equivalent for laying down his Life, and suffering the Pains of the most bitter and cruel Death; and this he receives. What wrong therefore can there be in this, that Almighty God, to deter his moral Subjects from future Rebellion, and more effectually secure their Felicity, should insist upon the Vindication

Vindication of his Government from Contempt; yet of his infinite Mercy accept the Mediation of a third Person in Man's Nature, who will do this in our stead, and at the same time hath an Equivalent for his Undertakings and Sufferings in our behalf? No Injury is done to any Person, but the highest Good is advanced upon the whole. Therefore it is no Impeachment of infinite Equity to transfer, in this case, the Punishment from the Offender, to the Innocent. I shall now, as I proposed, show, that there is occasion for the Appointment of a Mediator between God and Men.

God, that infinitely pure and perfect Spirit, must upon Mens Declension and Depravity be offended with them; yet like himself slow to execute Vengeance, and prone to forgive, he was ready to try to reclaim, e'er he came to use Extremity with them: and because Men, sensible of their Guilt and moral Impurity, durst not immediately address the divine Being, he proposed a third Person thro' whom he declared the Difference should be taken up, and Men become again reconciled to his divine Majesty.

That he was not in himself implacable, does clearly appear from his gracious Proposal to decide the Controversy he had with his Creature Man; and it is equally evident he was not altogether without Displeasure and Resentment for Mens Neglect of the Law of their Nature,

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Nature, and for involving themselves in contempt of his supreme Authority in moral Corruption ; because the very Appointment of a Mediator implies that he was at variance with us. Those consequently talk in the dark, and their Phrases seem to have an obscure, if any Meaning at all, who affect to represent the divine Mind propitious to Sinners antecedent to a Mediator between him and them. Whereas it is manifest from the Scriptures, that all God's Favours have been dispens'd to Men by virtue of the Satisfaction of Jesus Christ. And since this is the Ground and Foundation of all the divine Benefits vouchsafed unto us, how true is it to say, God was propitious to Mankind antecedent to the Undertakings of his Son on our behalf ? This is to assert Effects are antecedent to their Causes.

It will naturally be urged in Reply to what has been said, that the supreme Being was propitious to Sinners antecedent to any Satisfaction made to his Government upon the account of Man's Rebellion against it, otherwise he would not have given his Son for our Redemption. What do Men mean by the Propitiousness of the Deity ? Do they intend that God was at peace with Mankind before he paid any regard to the Honour of his violated Law, or stated new Terms of Allegiance in order to our Acceptance with him ?

This cannot be, because if the Breach was already made up, why should he send his Son
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at all? Surely Persons only intend by the Deity being originally propitious to Sinners what all must allow, that he was not implacable and averse to be reconciled; but of his matchless Love, and boundless Goodness, enter'd into such Measures with us, that upon Satisfaction being given to his violated Law, and upon our Conformity to those Terms, he should think proper for the time to come to settle with us, he would be propitious; *i. e.* gracious and merciful in taking us into favour. Every one therefore may observe a wide difference between Placableness and Propitiousness; the one signifies that a Person is actually appeasable; the other, that he is actually appeased. God was originally willing to be reconciled to Sinners; but he is really at peace with us, as Christ has done honour to his broken Covenant; and as we answer the Demands of our Law in his holy Gospel.

It follows, that the blessed Jesus acts as Mediator with God for Men, as he has given in our stead full and complete Satisfaction for the Violation of the original Law of our Nature: and he acts as Mediator from God to Men, by all the various ways wherein he treats with us, to persuade us into sincere Obedience to the divine Will. Hence he is said *to have been made Sin for us, to be the Propitiation for our Sins, and to be our Peace.*

It may be alledged, that these Phrases, *He is made Sin for us, &c.* with many others of

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the same Import, are used purely for this reason, God would have the Death of Christ spoken of under the Notion of a Sacrifice, to wean Mankind from the Sacrifices they were accustom'd to offer unto him. What would Men argue from hence? That the divine Being would represent the Death of his Son as being something which it really was not. The true Inference rather is, that Christ did die as a proper Sacrifice, because God affirms it. If the Death of Christ must be represented as a Sacrifice, to abolish all the legal Sacrifices, it would be much more effectual to this purpose to make it appear he died a real and proper Sacrifice, as *St. Paul* has done sufficiently in the 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10th Chapters of his Epistle to the *Hebrews*.

That there was occasion for a Mediator, and that God, placable in his own Nature, appointed his Son to act in this Character, being vindicated, we are now to examine into the Design of it.

The Mediator between God and Men is not (as some foolishly imagine) to roll and lean upon, as a Person ordain'd to do all for us; neither is he one, as others affect ridiculously to talk, who is to suggest some new Arguments in our behalf to the Deity, which he was a Stranger to before; yet he advanced those Reasons which God, in Vindication of the Authority of his Government, thought good to require, e'er he would enter into new
Terms

Terms of Reconciliation with Sinners : *i. e.* he gave Satisfaction to God for Man's Violation of the original Law of his Nature, and hereby rendred it consistent with the Sacredness of the divine Authority, to propose new Conditions of Peace and Acceptance with himself to Sinners : at one and the same time he answer'd the Demands of the first ; and purchased the new Covenant. One great End of a Mediator therefore,

1st, Is to expresse to Mankind God's Abhorrence of Sin, and that he will not dispense with our wilful Violation of his Laws, but will insist upon it that their Demands be answered. Had the divine Being winked at Man's Disobedience, and called for no Satisfaction to the Honour of his Government, this might have given too great occasion to future Rebellion ; but now none can sin with hopes of Impunity.

2dly, Another wise and good End of a Mediator between God and Men, is to render us highly sensible at what an infinite Distance all moral Depravity removes us from God. Persons, stained with Guilt, can't expect to meet with acceptance from the divine Majesty, but through the Intercession of him, who in our Nature is holy and harmless, pure and perfect : *who did no sin, neither was Guile found in him.* This immaculate and spotless Person will not take our Names into his Lips, or mediate for us, with the Father, unless to the

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utmost of our Powers we imitate his Example in abhorring Sin, in doing good, and in being pure in Heart and Life. Men must advance in universal Virtue, and endeavour to be conformed to the Likeness of Christ, or he will be no Mediator for them. He is one with the Father in this particular, *The Foolish shall not stand in his sight, he hateth all the Workers of Iniquity.* The sincerely penitent, humble and obedient, shall alone find favour with him. These will he present without Spot before the Presence of infinite Purity and Holiness; all others he will separate and banish for ever from the Fruition of God and Happiness. Can there be a more powerful Argument to universal Holiness, than the Ordination of such a Mediator between the supreme Being and Mankind: or that every time we approach unto God we should do it in his Name, who in our Nature lived such an innocent and useful Life? Can there be a greater Motive to Virtue, than so often to remember and mention in the divine Presence such a perfect Pattern of all Goodness?

3dly, Such a Mediator with God, yields us the most divine Encouragement and Assurance of our Acceptance with him, if we be sincere in our Obedience; because hereby Men are fully satisfied that complete Satisfaction has been rendred to the divine Being, in our stead, for the Violation of the original Law of our Nature. Therefore that God now treats with

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us upon Terms agreeable to the Weakness and Imbecility of our Powers, incapable of unfinishing Perfection.

We also have a great High-Priest who hath been tempted in all points as we are, and consequently is touched with a feeling of our Infirmities, and knows how to have compassion on the Ignorant, and on them that are out of the way. The Throne of God is henceforth a Throne of Grace to every penitent and devout Mind. Our blessed Lord, to put the matter out of doubt, and to confirm our Faith, says with a solemn Asseveration, *Verily, verily, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my Name, he will give it you*, John xvi. 23. *Hitherto have you asked nothing in my Name; ask and ye shall receive, that your Joy may be full.—Ye shall ask in my Name: and I say unto you, that I will pray the Father for you.—For I leave the World, and go to the Father.*

Finally, The christian Mediator answers the noble and glorious End of abolishing all the Sacrifices both of *Jews* and *Gentiles*. The Son of God becoming a *Mediator between God and Men*, and making his righteous Soul an Offering for Sin; there is henceforth no occasion to have recourse to any other Intercessors, nor to offer up any more Sacrifices; but to come into the Presence of the divine Being, upon account of that all-sufficient Atonement, the Blood of Christ, *for the Remission*
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of Sin; and the Acceptance of all those with God, *that are of a broken and contrite Spirit*, and have a superlative Love to the divine Being, obeying him universally, even to the End of their Lives.

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